

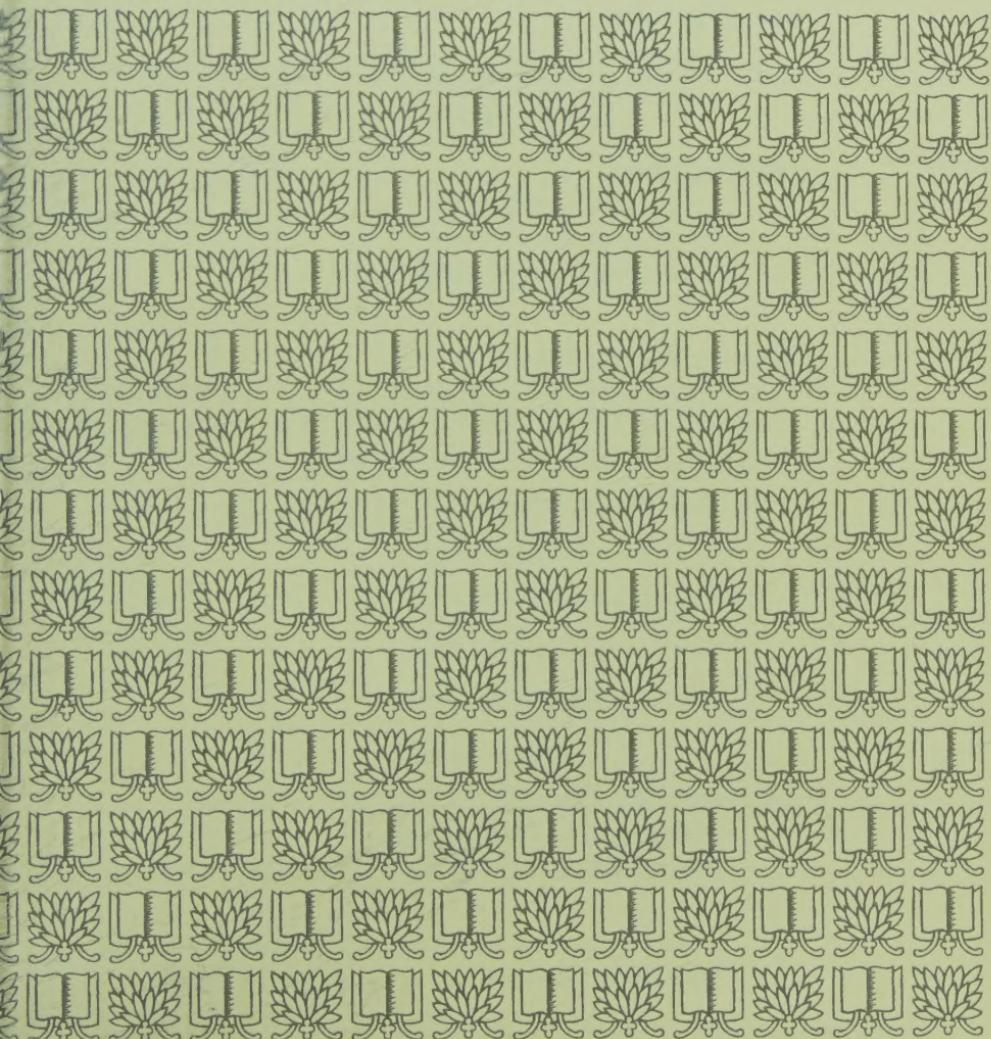
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# IRISH BIBLICAL STUDIES



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# **IRISH BIBLICAL STUDIES**

**VOLUME 28, ISSUE 3, 2010**

**ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF**

**REV PROF. STANLEY McIVOR  
B.A.,BD., PH.D**

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Rev. Principal Patton Taylor MBE.**

## Foreword

James Stanley McIvor was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1954, having studied through Trinity College, Dublin, New College Edinburgh, and also at the Presbyterian College ("Assembly's College") in Belfast. He began his ministerial career as a Chaplain to the Forces (Army) and over ten years he served in a number of postings, including a period as Deputy Warden of the Royal Army Chaplain's Department Depot and Training Centre at Bagshot Park. In 1964, he moved from the military world to the "front line" of theological teaching within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as Principal and Professor of Hebrew, New Testament Interpretation and Biblical Literature at Magee Theological College in Londonderry. Following the amalgamation of Magee and Assembly's Colleges by Act of Parliament in 1978, Stanley McIvor was appointed to the Chair of Old Testament Literature, Language and Theology in the newly formed Union Theological College, a post which he held until his retirement in 1994.

Stanley was renowned for the meticulous nature of his scholarship, not least in his PhD thesis on the Targums of Chronicles, followed by his published edition with translation, introduction, apparatus and notes.<sup>1</sup> He contributed to *Irish Biblical Studies* with an article 'Translators – Their Method and their Problems'<sup>2</sup> His rigorous (almost military style of) teaching in the classroom, in particular of Biblical Languages, is "fondly" remembered by several generations of Presbyterian Church in Ireland ministers (and other former students of

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<sup>1</sup> DRG Beattie and JS McIvor, *The Targums of Ruth and Chronicles* (The Aramaic Bible 19; T&T Clarke: Edinburgh, 1994)

<sup>2</sup> J.S. McIvor, 'Translators – Their Method and their Problems', *IBS* vol 11, Issue 3, 1989, 106-123.

Magee and Union Colleges). The students who studied under him, however, equally remember the personal interest he took in each of his students and the warmth of support and encouragement which he gave. I myself am numbered among the many who are greatly indebted to him for his mentoring role and for the encouragement and support he gave me in pursuing Old Testament scholarship. It was a privilege to study under his tutelage in the 1970s, both for ministerial training and at postgraduate level; and it was an even greater privilege to succeed him as Professor of Old Testament Theology in Union College in 1994.

Stanley was the mainstay of College administration and organisation. He served for many years as Secretary of the College Faculty and of the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland. In this, as in all his roles, the whole College community was greatly appreciative of his ability to combine efficiency and attention to detail with an overall awareness of the “big picture” and of the “strategic” implications. In addition, he always maintained a fresh vision for the future. The College is greatly in his debt.

Stanley’s career spanned half a century of Union College history. As a student at the College, he participated in the Centenary celebrations in 1953 and he was present as a recently retired Professor at the Sesquicentenary celebrations in 2003. On behalf of his peers from his own student days, of the generations of students who benefited from his wisdom, support, and encouragement, and of those who served across the years as his colleagues on Faculty, I am very glad indeed to guest-edit this Festschrift collection of essays in honour of his recent 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and to wish him “many happy returns”.

*Rev. Prof J Patton Taylor MBE*

## THE PRIORITY OF THE LAWS CONCERNING SLAVES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MISHPATIM IN THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT-COINCIDENTAL OR PURPOSEFULLY PLACED?

Rev Dr James Williamson

*It is a very great honour to be asked to contribute this article in honour of Prof J Stanley McIvor (Professor Emeritus [Old Testament] Union Theological College). I do so not only on behalf of myself but also with the gratitude of the late Rev Principal Richard Greenwood (Edgehill Theological College). We both were highly privileged to have shared in the Edgehill/Union teaching arrangements as colleagues of Professor Stanley McIvor. Stanley McIvor was held in the highest esteem and in the best sense feared and revered by those he taught over many years. His outstanding scholarly ability and deep concern to give the very best to those who had the privilege to sit at his feet is widely acknowledged. He was the master who loved his Lord and always had the interests of his students at heart. Many will testify to this day how he shaped their lives in Ministry and other spheres of Christian service.*

### ABSTRACT

The manumission laws in Exod. 21:2-11 have provoked extensive discussion among scholars. Their placement at the beginning of the *Mishpatim* has evoked vigorous debate as to whether they are awkwardly inserted or purposefully set in the narrative structure of the Book of the Covenant and the wider Sinai periscope. Diachronic and synchronic readings of the text have in the past tended to produce diverse interpretations. Preoccupation with identification and reconstructions of underlying sources and traditions can lead to an overlooking of the skilful artistry and theological understandings reflected in the final form of the text. The main thrust of this article is to demonstrate that these laws encapsulate in microcosm the wider macrocosm of God's release of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and the covenant relationship of Yahweh with his people.

## THE MANUMISSION LAWS OF EXODUS 21:2-11

The Manumission laws of Exodus 21:2-11 are a microcosm of a key theme of the Book of the Covenant.<sup>1</sup> This key theme of slavery and freedom has priority not only in the Book of the Covenant but also in the Book of Exodus. The association of the Book of Exodus with regulations concerning slavery appears in the opening words of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2:

anc' יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךְ אֲשֶׁר הַזְּאתָחִיךְ מִארְצֶן מִצְרָיִם מִבֵּית עֲדִים

Yahweh is identified as the liberating God who freed his people from the oppression of Egypt. It is interesting to note that all the legal collections of the ancient Near East treat the subject of slavery, but largely speaking approach it with ambivalence.<sup>2</sup> The *Mishpatim*<sup>3</sup> in the Book of the Covenant commences with ten laws regulating the institution of slavery in contradistinction to other legal collections of the ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:22-23:33, is adjudged by the majority of scholars to be the so-called (**ספר הברית**), the Book of the Covenant. The consensus view of scholars is that this was the earliest legal collection in the Hebrew Bible; a key area of debate is: To what extent it can be understood as a code of state law enforceable by courts, or whether it represents a religious “ideal” inspiring what ought to be?

<sup>2</sup> N M Sarna, *Exodus*, p.118-119 commenting on the wider legislation of the ancient near East in relation to biblical legal collections, notes: “everywhere the attitude to the slave was marked by ambivalence: He was a human being in close contact with his master and other members of the family; but he was also an item of property to be assessed in terms of monetary value. Biblical legislation, however, is directed toward enhancing the social and legal status of this human chattel (Cf.Exod. 20:10; 21:20 & 26-27, 23:12; Lev.25:39-42; Deut. 5:14; 15:12; 16:11-12, 14; Jer.34:9, 14-17).

<sup>3</sup> B S Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws*, A Study of the Mishpatim of Exodus 21:1-2:16, states “the idea that the Mishpatim were used as instruction to judges, to be applied in particular cases, remains popular and may still represent the dominant opinion.” However, the range of both the noun and the verb are much wider in the Old Testament. *Mishpat* may refer to a specific instruction, or to a generally accepted custom, or to a rightful claim.

near East and one of the best known, namely the Code of Hammurabi, deals with slavery last. The significance of the exodus event<sup>4</sup> and its reverberations throughout the canon of Scripture set it apart as God's act of salvation par excellence in the Old Testament. It helped to mould Israel's self-understanding that they were God's people and this great act of deliverance became the paradigm for all future deliverances. That paradigm is highlighted at the beginning of the *Mishpatim*. It is not awkwardly placed but purposefully ordered as it focuses on the relationship between Israel and Yahweh, underscoring the twofold purpose. On the one hand it sets out how slaves in Israel should be treated and on the other it underpins the relationship between Israel and their God of faithful covenant promise.<sup>5</sup> The concept of being a slave forever is presented rather paradoxically in terms of loving one's master. B Jacob makes an interesting point. He says, "the Christian interpreters (Dillmann, Stack, Holzinger, Baer, Driver, McNeile, Weiss, Heinisch, Jirku) have called these first two statements 'the law of slaves and their rights,' but this is incorrect, for the opening verse declares that there were no Hebrew 'slaves'. A person whose bondage is limited cannot be a slave. These preliminary remarks were intended to prohibit Hebrew slaves. Every Israelite who had been led out of Egyptian slavery possessed the basic right (*mish-pat*) of personal freedom.<sup>6</sup> This paradoxical motif resonates throughout the book of Exodus as a whole. The Israelites have been released from slavery through the defining actions of Yahweh in the exodus, they in turn are invited to reciprocate at Sinai and become slaves in order to serve Yahweh forever out

<sup>4</sup> The date of the exodus is still a subject for debate among scholars and as yet, has yielded no clear consensus.

<sup>5</sup> T D Alexander, in *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch*, p. 87, concurs with this view.

<sup>6</sup> B Jacob, *Exodus*, p.610.

of love. The *Mishpatim* not only regulate the laws of slavery, but also justify indirectly God's actions in releasing the Israelites from the harsh bondage of Egypt (cf. Exod. 2:11; 5:14-16). It could also be argued that there is a connection with Exod. 3:21-22; 11:2; 12:35-36; in these passages the Israelites demanded articles of silver, gold and clothing from the Egyptians and as a result were compensated for the way they were exploited by the Egyptians.<sup>7</sup> There is a strong possibility that this is echoed in the Book of the Covenant in relation to a set of laws which focuses on the concept of restitution (cf. Exod. 22:1-15). The debate as to whether עברי (*ivri*) can be understood as an ethnic or sociological designation will be addressed later. What is relevant for the priority of the slave laws at the beginning of the *Mishpatim* is that the author, by describing the slave as uses a term associated with Israel's slavery in Egypt. Exod.21:2 uses the Hebrew root עבר and the Hebrew verb יצא terms which are also related to the wider Exodus theme. The theme of deliverance from slavery is an important emphasis of the first Passover. Moses reminds the people of Yahweh's great act of deliverance when he says, "Remember this day on which you came out (יצא) of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (בֵּית עֲבָדִים)" (Exod.13:3). As already noted this motif prefaces the

<sup>7</sup> The despoiling of the Egyptians has been a subject of keen debate in scholarship. It raise questions like – Was this a temporary borrowing of adornments in the light of sacrifice in the desert – to be returned when they came back? Was it a final parting and offering of gifts to banish ill feeling? Does it reflect a kindlier attitude to the Hebrews from the ordinary Egyptian populace? A whole gamut of views on this complex issue is presented by scholars such as (Hyatt, Cole, Daube, Jacob) ranging from 'aetiological', to explain the source of the materials for the golden calf, to the idea of not being 'borrowed' but 'asked', or the notion of not being sent out 'empty-handed' in 'refutation of the idea of thievery' or the idea of 'farewell gifts being freely given'.

Decalogue and a link between Exod.21:2-6 and the wider theme of liberation from bondage in Exodus finds a further parallel in Deut. 15:12-18.<sup>8</sup> J M Sprinkle comments on this parallel passage in Deuteronomy by suggesting:

Whereas the connection made between this regulation and Israel's historical experience of being servants in Egypt could be an innovation by the writer of Deuteronomy, it is quite plausible that this point, like the reference to six years of servitude and the ceremony of making a person a slave for life, is part of Deuteronomy's interpretation of the Exodus passage itself in which the writer has (correctly) perceived a connection between the placement of the case of the slave עבד עברי at the beginning of Exod.21:2-23:19 and Israel's experience of servitude in Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "If a member of your community whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman is sold to you and works for six years, in the seventh year, you shall set that person free. And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you, for this reason I lay this command on you today. (Deut. 15:12-15).

<sup>9</sup> J M Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant*, p.181. G C Chirichigno, *Debt Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, commenting on the manumission law of Deuteronomy says, "while scholars agree unanimously that the manumission law in Deut. 15:12-18 is based on the manumission law in Exod.21:2-6, nevertheless the former law includes stipulations not found in the latter and vice versa. These additions and omissions have led some scholars to suggest that the law in Deuteronomy is significantly different from that in Exodus. Chirichigno concludes, although the deuteronomist has employed terminology not found in Exod.21:2-6 such as ריקם, אח, ימבר, and so on, these additions reflect the theological intentions of the deuteronomist rather than any attempt to make fundamental changes to the older manumission law in Exod. 21:2-6."

To summarise, the detailed stipulations at the beginning of the *Mishpatim* in Exodus 21 are placed skillfully by the author. The “going out” to freedom of the Book of Exodus. The lesson the Israelites must learn from their own experience of bondage in Egypt is the importance of treating those in bondage more humanely. The liberation of the oppressed Israelites becomes the paradigm for all liberation and sets the agenda for the legislation and moral imperatives which permeate a major section of the Book of the Covenant, namely Exodus 21:1-23:9.

### A BRIEF SEMANTIC RÉSUMÉ OF WORDS RESERVITUDE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A cursory look at the vocabulary of servitude in the Old Testament suggests that there are four main words used in the semantic range.<sup>10</sup> The two terms and their cognates which are found in the Book of the Covenant are עבד and אמָה. In the ancient Near East the root 'bd is attested in most Semitic languages with the exception of Ethiopic. The primary meaning is slave or worshipper. The most frequent Hebrew word used to designate a slave/servant in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is עבד ('ebed). It usually describes “a dynamic relationship between two individuals, which may be “permanent or temporary, and literal or figurative”.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> NIDOTTE summarises them as follows: 1 אמָה (*amâ*), female slave, maidservant. 2 נחִין (*natin*), temple servant 3 שפָחָה (*siphâ*), female slave, maidservant. 4 עבד ('ebed), servant, slave, subject, official, and also found in personal names.

<sup>11</sup> R Schultz, “Servant Slave”, NIDOTTE, Vol. 4 p.1184 develops this by stating “ ‘ebed occurs ca. 800x times in the Hebrew Bible (in all books except Ruth, Song of Solomon and six of the minor Prophets; (the Aramaic form occurs 7x times). This relationship is usually indicated syntactically: more than 440x with a pronominal suffix (“his/your slave”), more than 200x

difficulty with word studies, their cognates, semantic and etymological enquiries is that they are often more speculative than precise and conclusions have to be reached with caution. This is illustrated by attempting to understand the exact nature of the relationship between the noun, ‘*ebed*’ and the verb of the same root ‘*bd*’. Also there is a wide ranging debate about the basic concept which lies behind the ‘*ebed*’, allowing it to designate, not only the lowest social status of abject poverty, but also the highest rank of being God’s servant. An interesting exercise is to study the various uses and multiple nuances of the nine occurrences of the Hebrew word עָבֵד in 2 Sam. 9. It is noteworthy that the law of the Jubilees underscores the idea that the Israelites are Yahweh’s servants by virtue of the exodus from Egypt. The corollary is that, having been delivered from slavery to Pharaoh, they are now to serve Yahweh.<sup>12</sup>

The other Hebrew word אִמְהָ (‘*amah*’) which occurs in the Book of the Covenant denotes a female slave or maidservant. The term is used to designate a woman as having a subordinate social status and a subservient role or in a sense which expresses contempt or disapproval<sup>13</sup> N M Sarna addressing the use of the term אִמְהָ in Exod.21:21:7-11 argues:

The Hebrew term used here, does not mean a slave girl in the usual sense, since her status is quite

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through a construct relationship (“slave of x”) and more than 40x through the possessive use of the preposition *le*.“

<sup>12</sup> This is clearly articulated as follows: “For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves.” (Lev.25:55).

<sup>13</sup> The pejorative sense is expressed in Gen.21:10: ‘So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.”’ The legacy of tension and conflict in the interpretation of this verse has percolated down to the present in the conflicting ways that two of the great monotheistic faiths, Islam and Judaism, see themselves as the ‘children of Abraham’.

different from the male slave. The following laws safeguard her rights and protect her from sexual exploitation. In the ancient world a father driven by poverty, might well sell his daughter into a well-to-do family in order to secure her future security. The sale presupposes marriage to the master or his son.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to understand what an author invests in the meaning of a word and what determines his choice of that word. Like other authors, it is reasonable to assume that the biblical authors chose particular words because they carried precisely the meaning that they, the biblical authors wanted to communicate. While etymological enquiry and semantic study of words have their limitations, careful analysis of the way words have evolved over time can help us to see that sometimes their current meaning is only vaguely related to their original meaning.

### **THE PROBLEMS RELATING TO THE MEANING AND “SITZ IM LEBEN” OF THE MANUMISSION LAWS IN EXODUS 21: 2-11**

Scholarly debate in relation to the laws of servitude in Exod.21:2-11 and other relevant passages in Deuteronomy and Leviticus<sup>15</sup> have been influenced by the discovery of references to the *habiru* in the Amarna letters<sup>16</sup> and other extant

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<sup>14</sup> N M Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 120. He further comments that “documents recording legal arrangements of this kind have survived from Nuzi. The Torah stipulates that the girl must be treated as a free woman, and should the designated husband take an additional wife, he is still obliged to support her. A breach of faith gains her freedom and the master receives no compensation for the purchase price”.

<sup>15</sup> Deut.15:12-18 and Lev.25:39-54.

<sup>16</sup> Initially some 300 tablets containing the El Amarna Letters were discovered by an Egyptian woman in 1887 AD/CE. Subsequently a total of 540 clay tablets have been recovered and to date some 378 have been

documents and also the ongoing and far from resolved dating of the sources J, E, D and P. Discussions have oscillated between the various opinions about the precise nature of the relation of the *habiru* to the biblical (ם עברִי) (*ivri*). A Alt, being careful to point out that the Hebrew term tells us little of anyone's legal status or nationality, argued that the relevant passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy referred to Israelites who belonged to a lower social class. J Lewy paying careful attention to the wider canvass of the ancient Near East examined the biblical manumission laws against the background of the Nuzi *habiru* service contracts and suggested the laws related to the releasing of foreign slaves. S Paul engaged in a comparative study of Exod.21:2-6 with the Nuzi service contracts and evoked a strong reaction from I Cardellini who found no clear parallels with such Nuzi service contracts, but accepted Alt's contention that the (ם עברִי) were a lower social class. Both I Riesener and S A Kaufman concur that the manumission laws relate to a class of landless Israelites. Neither compares the laws with the Nuzi service contracts. However, Riesener argues for the term עברי to be understood as an ethnic designation and concluded that the biblical laws reflected a greater affinity with the manumission laws of Hammurabi, in particular Article 117, where it is stated that "if a citizen sells his wife, his son, his daughter or himself into slavery to pay a debt, then the creditor cannot contract for more than three years' service and must free them at the beginning of the fourth year."<sup>17</sup> In a very recent study just published in

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published. The letters were written by Canaanite and Egyptian scribes in a dialect of Akkadian using cuneiform script.

<sup>17</sup> For further study of the diverse views of scholars on this complex issue see A Alt, *The Origins of Israelite Law*, 93-96; B S Childs, *Exodus*, p. 468; J Lewy, 'Habiru and Hebrews', *HUCA* 14 (1939), 15(1940) and 28 (1957); S M Paul, *The Book of the Covenant*, pp.45-46; I Cardellini, *Die biblischen 'Sklaven-Gesetze im Lichte des Keilschriftlichen rechts: Ein*

2009 by D P Wright entitled, *Inventing God's Law*, How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi (Oxford University Press), a more radical view of the composition of the Covenant Code is articulated. He argues it depends directly and primarily upon the Laws of Hammurabi and to a lesser degree on other cuneiform legal collections. His model is one of literary dependence rather than oral traditions. This link, he suggests, came about during the Neo-Assyrian period (around 740-640 BCE) when Mesopotamia exerted dominant cultural and political influence over the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. He avers that the author of the Covenant Code "replaced Hammurabi as law composer with Yahweh as law revealer to create an alternative and competitive reality to counter the effects of Assyrian imperialism."<sup>18</sup> While innovative, scholarly and radical this view represents a model which relies heavily on a concept that in places is speculative and reads the Covenant Code with too direct a dependence on the Laws of Hammurabi. As we have deduced, examination and analysis of the complex nature of the data which surrounds the term עָבֵד has produced diversity of views among scholars and yielded no clear consensus. The traditional interpretation as reflected in the NRSV translation takes עָבֵד (*ivri*) to be "gentilic", thus referring to a Hebrew male slave as opposed to an alien slave. Others favour the view that it refers to an inferior social class comparable to the *habiru* mentioned in Akkadian records and cognates mentioned in Ugaritic and Egyptian documents.

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*Beitrag zur Tradition, Überlieferung und Redaktion der alttestamentlichen Rechtstexte*, pp.243-251, 337-344; I Riesener, *Der Stamm עָבֵד im Alten Testamente: Eine Wortuntersuchung unter Berücksichtigung neuerer Sprachwissenschaftlicher Methoden* (BZAW, 149), pp.115135; S A Kaufman, 'A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems of Ancient Israel' JSOTS 31, pp.277-286.

<sup>18</sup> D P Wright, *Inventing God's Law*, p.121.

However, as the term עָבֵד does not occur in Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25 the meaning and *Sitz im Leben* of the laws relating to slavery in the Book of the Covenant in Exod. 21:2-6 have generally been deduced from the various ways in which scholars have understood how these chapters had been influenced by the dating of J, E, D & P sources of the Graf-Wellhausen classical hypothesis<sup>19</sup> A cursory glance at the face of Old Testament studies in the 21 century cannot but fail to alert us to the fact that Pentateuchal criticism is in something of a crisis. Some scholars remain committed to the basic concept of the Documentary Hypothesis, others argue for a substantial modification of its tenets and some argue for fresh paradigms.<sup>20</sup> G C Chirichigno observes that “in the wake of various commentaries and monographs on Deuteronomy, the general scholarly consensus is that the origins of Deuteronomy should be divorced from Josiah’s or Hezekiah’s reform.”<sup>21</sup> D has often been described as the lynchpin of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis, especially its alleged date at the time of the Josianic reforms. If that date can no longer be viewed as an agreed tenet of source-critical theory, then the classical theory as we know it, is thrown into disarray. For example, if a study of the manumission laws in Leviticus takes the Wellhausenian model, then D must be dated earlier than P and the conclusion arrived at is that the laws in Leviticus either replaced or abrogated the former laws in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

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<sup>19</sup> The main conclusions of Wellhausen’s findings were that D was associated with the reforms of Josiah and therefore later than J and E but earlier than P.

<sup>20</sup> During the last hundred years a variety of studies critical of the Documentary Hypothesis have emerged, among them, some who no longer simply reflect a conservative theological outlook. Some of the most significant are the studies of J Van Seters, R Rendtorff, E Blum and R N Whybray.

<sup>21</sup> G C Chirichigno, *Debt Slavery*, p. 20.

However, Wenham, Wright and Japhet, all date P prior to D and suggest that Lev. 25:39-54 is prior to Deut: 15:12-18, although their interpretations of the manumission laws vary greatly.<sup>22</sup>

Scholars now recognize the limitations of source and form critical analyses, which draw from a diachronic methodology. This is not to imply a disinterest in the historical background to the manumission laws of the Pentateuch but simply to acknowledge the impasse and limits of this approach. G C Chirichigno proposes a way which he contends, may help scholarly discussion to move forward beyond the present impasse. He avers: "both analyses suffer from not being prefaced by an adequate discussion of the social and legal background of debt-slavery in Mesopotamia."<sup>23</sup> By broadening the investigation to include the consensus views of Assyriologists and other scholars who specialise in Near Eastern Studies, Chirichigno attempts to bring a more holistic approach to the problem of debt-slavery in Israel. In the various legal collections of the ancient Near East there were several laws which dealt specifically with the treatment of debt-slaves, particularly in relation to the problems of manumission. Chirichigno argues, correctly, that these laws, royal edicts, loan transactions and stipulations with regard to service impinge on the biblical laws of servitude.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For further study see: G A Wenham, *Leviticus*, p.12; C J H Wright, 'What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel? Old Testament Sabbatical Institutions for Land, Debt and Slaves, Part 1' *EvQ* 56 pp.193-201; S Japhet, 'The Relationship Between the Legal Corpora in the Pentateuch in the Light of the Manumission Laws' in *Studies in Bible* 1986 (*Scripta Hierosolymitana* 31), pp.63-69.

<sup>23</sup> G C Chirigno, *Debt Slavery*, p.27. Chirichigno is challenging scholars to engage in a comprehensive comparative investigation of the social background of the institution of debt-slavery in the ancient Near East.

<sup>24</sup> For further study, see G C Chirichigno, *Debt Slavery*. pp. 99-100. For example commenting on the Nuzi *tidennitu* loan and *habiru* service

In the ancient world, scholars generally agree that there were two main sources of slavery – foreign slaves captured in war and debt-slaves usually impoverished by their fellow-countrymen.<sup>25</sup> Commenting on the two principal sources of slavery B S Jackson concludes:

The former, in principle (i.e. failing redemption) a permanent status, is sometimes termed “chattel slavery”: like property, the slave might be sold (outright) on the slave market; its “produce” (offspring) belonged to the master (*fructus*); could be disciplined by the master at will (just as ownership of property includes the right to destroy it). Debt-slavery, by contrast, was normally not a permanent status: correspondingly, the master’s rights in respect of disposal, offspring and discipline were limited. All three of these limitations are addressed in the *Mishpatim*.<sup>26</sup>

It could be argued that in describing the circumstances in which servitude has occurred, Exod. 21:2 could be understood as buying a person who is already a Hebrew slave. But *eved ivri* in the Hebrew text is usually regarded by scholars as a prolepsis (“a Hebrew, as/to be a slave”)<sup>27</sup> and the verb קנה (*kanah*) is better understood as meaning to “acquire” rather than in the narrower sense to “buy”.

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contacts, he suggests that “although these loan and service contracts do not appear in any of the legal collections, they have been used by some scholars to help elucidate the meaning of the manumission laws in Exod. 21:2-6 and Deut. 15:12-18.”

<sup>25</sup> This is underscored by scholars such as A Tosato, *Il Matrimonio Israelitico*; G C Chirichigno, *Debt Slavery*; V H Matthews, “The Anthropology of Slavery in the Covenant Code”; C Houtman, *Das Bundesbuch. Ein Kommentar*.

<sup>26</sup> B S Jackson, *Wisdom Laws*, p.81.

<sup>27</sup> This view is upheld by A Phillips, “The Laws of Slavery: Exodus 21.2-11”, JSOT 30.

## THE FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE DEBT-SLAVE LAWS IN EXODUS 21:2-11

Support for the assertion that the *Mishpatim* begin with an extensive sequence of casuistic laws on the topic of debt-slavery can be deduced from the relation between the two paragraphs on servitude. The paragraphs divide into two clear parts, verses 2-6 on a male debt-slave and verses 7-11 on a female, more specifically, a daughter debt-slave. The two sections are almost equal and symmetrical. The rules concerning the *amah* begin in verse 7 and reflect a cross-reference to the preceding rules which refer to the *eved*. Close scrutiny reveals that the laws are formulated in the category of casuistic primary law, in which the *protasis* describes a legal relationship and the *apodosis* prescribes the conditions of the relationship. This in a sense mirrors, in the master debt-slave relationship, the covenantal relationship of Yahweh with his people. Both sets of laws relating to the *eved* and the *amah* as well as being formulated in a similar way also contain corresponding stipulations. Y Zakovitch uncovers in the two slave laws an intricate literary pattern, which he argues is found in narrative and legal sections of the Old Testament and other writings in the ancient Near East. He observes that both sets of laws begin with a general principle, followed by four sub-sections and in each of the fourth sub-sections an unusual circumstance arises which seems out of place in terms of general thrust and logical outcome.<sup>28</sup> The unusual outcome of the two debt-slave laws is as follows: the male slave chooses to stay with his master rather than going free in the seventh year and the female slave goes out without payment when her master fails to live up to his obligations. Each law however

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<sup>28</sup> Y Zakovitch, ‘For Three and for Four’: The Pattern for Numerical Sequence Three-Four in the Bible, pp.450-453.

forms a chiastic structure in the relationship of verse 5 to verse 7 and verse 2 to verse 11 as follows:

הָעֲבָרִים לא אֵצֶא The male slave does not go out free (v.5)      לא חַצֵּא בְּצָאתָה The female slave does not go out free (v.7).

וְבַשְׂבֻעִית יֵצֵא לא אֵצֶא The male servant goes out free without payment (v.2)      וַיַּצֵּחַ חָנָם The female slave goes out without payment (v.7).

The unusual structure of the two juxtaposed debt-slave laws, reflect an elaborate literary structure which probably indicates the carefully crafted work of a single compiler. The *eved* may be used for breeding purposes but he does not lose his right to seventh-year freedom. He is given the choice – by his own speech-act – to change his status to that of permanent servitude, if he opts to remain in the household of his master. The female slave, on the other hand, loses her right to seventh-year freedom. She has no choice and is afforded no speech-act.<sup>29</sup>

A close reading of the first slave laws in the Book of the Covenant from a synchronic perspective have provoked in recent scholarship a more a careful and extensive examination of the final form of the text. The question as to why they were placed at the head of the legal collection has evoked greater attention both internally and externally. The complementary and resonance between narrative and law in the Old Testament has now gained greater significance. The introductory verse of

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<sup>29</sup> Commenting on this section B S Jackson, *Wisdom Laws*, p.102, states, “it is the respective statuses of dependent men and women as sexual objects which the law here stresses; that status, for a man, does not negate his right to freedom; for a woman, in practice, it does. The man retains a relative autonomy in his sexuality; the woman cannot threaten the rights of her owner in her by retaining a right to freedom – a right which she might anticipate by showing an interest in another man even during the period of her enslavement.”

the *Mishpatim* (Exod.21:1), resonates with Exod.19:7, where Moses relates on Yahweh's instructions, the offer of the Sinai Covenant.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the substance of the code opens with the laws on servitude further resonates with beginning of the Decalogue, which is a timely reminder of their exodus from the house of bondage. This reinforces at the beginning of the *Mishpatim* the significance of freedom in the light of their past history. It is interesting to note that the prophet Jeremiah regarded the rule which set a limit on slavery for the Hebrew to six years not to Sinai, but rather to the exodus itself.<sup>31</sup> In this carefully crafted literary relationship there is a movement from freedom to servitude in Exod. 21:2-6 and from servitude to freedom in Exod. 21:7-11, culminating in the theme of transformation of status, a dominant theme of the exodus deliverance. D P Wright in his 2009 study argues that the Covenant Code's preoccupation with poverty is as ideological as it is ethical. By including the "immigrant" (גֵּר), which he argues takes the place of the "weak person", he avers that the Israelites once had this status in Egypt and as such he sees the poor in the Covenant Code as having a political dimension.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Both texts use the same Hebrew terminology: "So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people and set before them (וַיִּשְׁמֹךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם) all these words that the Lord had commanded him." (Exod. 19:7) "Now these are the *Mishpatim* you shall set before them (חֲשָׁמִים לִפְנֵיהֶם)." (Exod.21:1)

<sup>31</sup> "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery saying, "Every seventh year each of you must set free any Hebrews who have been sold to you and have served six years; you must set them free from your service." (Jer. 34:13-14).

<sup>32</sup> D P Wright, *Inventing God's Law*, pp. 150-151. While he agrees that the implicit message is that Yahweh is the king of Israel who has provided justice for the weak, including the Israelites under foreign domination (their Mesopotamian overlords), he argues from a primary political propagandist motif and to do so situates the Covenant Code in the period of Assyrian rule. He prefers a dating of the Code against the earlier consensus of

While there may be some insights in opting for an ethical and nationalistic explanation for the priority of the debt-slave laws in the Covenant Code, strong moralistic and theological motivations cannot simply be marginalised.

## EXEGESIS OF EXODUS 21:2-6 (THE MALE HEBREW SLAVE)

(2) כי תקנה عبد עברי שש שנים יעבד ובשבועת יצא לחפשי חנם

(3) אם־בנפו יבא בנפו יצא אס־בעל אשה הוא ויצאה אשתו עמו

(4) אם־אדני יתחלו אשה וילדה־לו בנים או בנות אשה וילדה  
תהייה לאדרניה והוא יצא בנפו

(5) ואם־אמור יאמר העבד אהבת־מי את־אדני אהבת־אשתי ואת־בני לא  
אצא חופשי

(6)<sup>33</sup> והנישו אדרני אל־האללים והנישו אל־הדרלה או אל המזוודה  
וירצע אדרני אהזונו ובמרצע ועבדו לעלם

Scholars in general are agreed that the kind of slavery described here is debt-slavery, where a person was financially

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scholarship, relying on his model of connection the Code directly with Hammurabi's text. However innovative this may be the jury is still out on these issues.

<sup>33</sup> Exod. 21:2-6, "When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt. If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and children shall be her master's and he shall go out alone. But if the slave declares," I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out a free person," then his master shall bring him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him for life."

insolvent and would sell either himself or his son to a fellow Israelite for a regulated period of time. However, as has been already noted, the precise identity of the עבד עברי has produced widespread debate. Some have drawn support from Nuzi parallels and others opt for similarities that exist between the biblical account and the Code of Hammurabi. A key question arises in relation to whether the method for entering into permanent servitude and the meaning of the declaration of the slave in Exod. 21:5-6 can be understood as unique to biblical legal collections. There is a division of scholarly opinion on this important issue. I Cardellini and N Lohfink argue that the procedure for entering into permanent slavery is unique to biblical law.<sup>34</sup> S Paul, on the other hand, compares the two rituals in Exod. 21: with what he suggests are similar practices found at Nuzi<sup>35</sup>. Scholars such as Chirichigno, Lemche and Phillips are not happy with his conclusions and find his arguments unconvincing. The debate has been intensified further in relation to the genuine intentions of the slave. And others point to the harshness of the stipulation in Exod. 21:4 and caution against the romanticising of the slave's love for his master. The consensus of argument in favour of understanding the slave's declaration in the plain sense has the advantage of obviating the austerity of the stipulation and treating the declaration as a genuine request. This view is upheld by B S Jackson and G Chirichigno.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the idea of being a slave forever in terms of loving one's master, encapsulates the wider motif of the Book of Exodus as a whole and mirrors the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. Having made the choice of remaining with his

<sup>34</sup> Cf. I Cardellini, "Die biblischen 'Sklaven' –Gesteze," p.248 and N Lohfink, 'עבד', *Th WAT III*, pp. 123-128, *TDOT*, V pp.114-118.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. S Paul, *The Book of the Covenant*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. G C Chirichigno, *Debt Slavery*, pp. 228-229 and B S Jackson, 2Some Literary Features of the Mishpatim," pp.235-236.

master, he was taken אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים<sup>37</sup> where his ear was pierced by an awl as a symbol of his renounced freedom. Boring the ear had a symbolic meaning as the ear was the organ of hearing and hearing in Hebrew is commonly used to denote obedience. N Leibowitz, stressing the significance of the overall motif of liberation from slavery in the Book of Exodus, makes an innovative and important point. He notes:

Only by a special ceremony before God can a Hebrew revoke his right to be free and serve a human master for life. Under God's order the Hebrews were to be servants only unto Him (Cf. Exod.4:23; 3:12) where the 'service' of the Egyptian bondage is replaced by the 'service of god' on the mountain.<sup>38</sup>

The Hebrew expression which is used to describe the status of the permanent slave who agrees to serve 'forever' is לְעָלֵם וּמַבּוּד<sup>39</sup>. This has engendered debate and has raised a number of problems. Does the expression contradict Lev. 25:40? This reads as follows: "they shall remain with you as hired and bound labourers. They shall serve with you until the year of jubilee." Is there any evidence in the Exodus passage that the permanent slave might be marked like a chattel slave and might this suggest a disparaging status? P Craigie observes that that the expression 'slave for ever' is found in Ugaritic literature without any derogatory overtones and G Chirichigno argues that the expression referred to a type of service which legally bound the slave to his master which should not be compared to

<sup>37</sup> This term has been interpreted variously by scholars as household gods, or 'judges' or God (who is located at the sanctuary).

<sup>38</sup> N Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot (Exodus)*: Part II *Mishpatim*. P. 290.

<sup>39</sup> The account in Deut. 15:17 also includes the name אֶמְתָּה and reads as follows:  
וְהִי לְךָ עֲלֵם וְאֶתְּנָךְ תַּעֲשֵׂה־כָּךְ

the status of a chattel slave.<sup>40</sup> Permanent slavery is wholly the Hebrew's choice based entirely on the love of his master and family. If these arguments can be sustained, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the status of the permanent slave carried with it deeper theological implications and mirrored in microcosm the unique covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. The theme of transformation of status is central to the narrative of Israelite slavery in Egypt and the Exodus event and is carried on into the reciprocity of the covenant relationship at Sinai.

## **EXEGESIS OF EXODUS 21:7-11 (THE FEMALE HEBREW SLAVE)**

(7) **וכירימכר איש אה'בתו לאמנה לא כצאת העבדים**

(8) **אם-דרעה בעני אדניה אשר (לו Qere) לא יעדת והפדה לעם נכרי לא-ים של למכרה בבודרבה**

(9) **ואם-לבענו ייעדרנה כמשפט הבנות יעשה-ילה**

(10) **אם-אחרת יקחלו שארה כסותה וענתה לא יגרע**

(11) **ואם-שלש-אללה לא יעשה לה ויצאה חنم אין כסף**<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. P Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p.239 and G Chirichigno, *Debt Slavery*, p.242.

<sup>41</sup> 7. "When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do.

8 If she does not please her master, who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed; he

shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt unfairly with her.

9 If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as a daughter.

It has already be argued that the conditionally formulated laws concerning the אמה (*amah*) has been carefully juxtaposed with the preceding law of the עבד עברי (*eved ivri*). While some scholars argue from a source critical perspective that the law in vv. 7-11 is older than the law in vv. 2-6, a careful analysis of the literary structure is useful to gain more precise insights of the status of the *amah*. This reinforces the significance of paying careful attention to the intricate structure of the ‘received text’ from a synchronic perspective. It could be argued forcefully that it seems unlikely a compiler, who carefully juxtaposed these two laws, would bring together two laws representing diverse social attitudes. A thoughtful and attentive reading of the text reveals, that, on the one hand, the marriage of the male debt slave does not affect his release, while, on the other, the *amah* is only set free if her master or husband does not fulfill his side of the marriage agreement. Does this mean that there was one form of debt-slavery applicable to men and another for women? While it must be acknowledged that the law of Exod. 21:7-11 resembles other ancient Near Eastern adoption contracts, the social standing of the *amah* can be better understood by a careful analysis of the stipulations in Exod. 21:7-11. This in turn throws up some interesting problems and has yielded no consensus in scholarship. The interpretation of verse 8 is usually based on the reading of the *Qere* אשר־לו יעדָה (who has designated her for himself).<sup>42</sup> A Schenker, however, takes the *kethibh* (“he

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10 If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of his first wife.

11 And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money.”  
(Exod. 21:7-11).

<sup>42</sup> The rendering of the *Kethibh* is accepted by only a few scholars. R E Clements, *Exodus*, p.131, follows the *Peshitta* and the rendering of the NEB

has not designated her") as the original reading and understands the *amah* to have entered the master's household as a domestic slave, but with the later option to be "designated" for a member of the household. This means that the female slave does not become automatically a concubine. A female slave can be taken simply for work and not for sexual purposes.<sup>43</sup> If the master breaks the contract to marry the *amah*, he must allow her to be ransomed by a member of her own family. The text, however, is not explicit as to whom she can be sold. The reason for this is that the expression **עַמּוֹנְכָרִי** has been interpreted in a variety of ways by scholars. Does it mean outside the girl's nuclear family or outside the master's nuclear family or outside the covenant community of Israel? The motivation clause, **בְּבָנָדו בָּהּ** (on account of his dealing treacherously with her), helps to provide an explanation, as to why, the master is not able to sell the girl to anyone, other than a member of her family. The verb **בָּנֵד** (*beqed*)<sup>44</sup> is usually translated 'to act faithlessly, treacherously or perfidiously, and occurs over 43 times in the Old Testament, mostly in the prophetic writings. It is used of God as the object but also where human beings commit acts of treachery against one

— 'If her master has not had intercourse with her'. This emends **ישֶׁדֶה** to **יעַדְתָּה**. C Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy*, pp.57-59 follows the *Kethibh* arguing that the *Qere* poses contextual problems. G C Chirighigno, *Debt Slavery*, p.248, drawing from scholars like Beer, Driver and Zakovitch opts for the reading **אֲשֶׁר־לֹו יִשְׁדַּה** and concludes, "following the majority of scholars, it is best to emend **לֹו** to **לֹא**, following the LXX, Vulgate and Targums." Three different interpretations of the verb **ישֶׁדֶה** in the Versions are rendered as follows: 'betrothal' (LXX and Vulgate); 'marriage' (Peshitta); 'designation/promise' (Targums – Onqelos, Pseudo-Jonathan).

<sup>43</sup> The idea is developed fuller by A Schenker in "Affranchissement d'une esclave selon Ex 21, 7-11", *Biblica* 69.

<sup>44</sup> R Wakely, 'בָּנֵד', *NIDOTTE*, comments, "attempts to connect the verb to the noun *beqed*, garment/clothing have received considerable support but they are not compelling."

another.<sup>45</sup> The idea here is one of severing a relationship and breaking of a contract, reinforcing the ending of a covenant bond. This further stresses the significance of the slave laws in relation to the wider motif of Israel's covenantal relationship with God.

Exod. 21:10 posits the case of the master who enters into a polygamous relationship with another wife or concubine. The consequence is that he is obliged to provide his first wife with three basic necessities of life to which she is entitled. The three Hebrew terms to describe this obligation have generated widespread scholarly debate. It is generally agreed that שארה covers food in general, כתובה relates to clothing, but it is the unique word ענחה (*onah*) (a hapax legomenon) that has led to much speculation. The LXX, the Peshitta and Targums all understood it to refer to the woman's conjugal rights. Whatever the precise meaning of these three terms, they articulate clearly that the *amah* was not sold into servitude for general use, but only as a wife, if her master or his son was displeased with her. Exod. 21:11, the final verse in the manumission law concerning the *amah*, has also generated debate. It reads as follows: "And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money". Some scholars take the view that this verse relates to the three basic necessities<sup>46</sup> of Exod. 21:10. Others,

<sup>45</sup> S Erlandsson, 'בגד' *Th Wat*, states "the verb expresses the unstable relationship of man to an existing regulation. It is used when the Old Testament writer wants to say that a man does not honour an agreement, or commits adultery, or breaks covenant or some other ordinance by God." S Paul in *Studies in the Book of the Covenant*, notes that *beged* in legal terminology is a functional equivalent of the Akkadian, *nabalkutu*, 'to break an agreement'

<sup>46</sup> This view is upheld by I Cassuto, J I Durham, M Noth, S Paul and A Phillips.

analyzing more closely the literary structure of Exod. 21: 8-10, argue that the previous three secondary cases of casuistic law relate to verse 11.<sup>47</sup> A careful synchronic reading of the text leads to the conclusion that the second view is the more persuasive. Commenting on what is described as a major exception in the manumission laws of the Book of the Covenant, which has no counterpart in the Laws of Hammurabi, G I Emmerson in her study of women in ancient Israel, concludes:

No provision is made for the release of a female slave after six years along with her male counterpart, for as an **אִמָּה** she was her master's concubine and continued as part of the larger family. It should not however be assumed that this was due to the inferior status of the female slave, or the fact that she, in particular was regarded as her master's personal property but rather as H W Wolff comments – “the man and wife relationship is thought of primarily as a lasting one, even with a slave”.<sup>48</sup>

An interesting exercise is to compare Exod.21:2 with Deut. 15:12 as the account in Deuteronomy includes both the male and female slave.<sup>49</sup> How, then, did Deuteronomy deal with the *amah*? In Deut. 15:17 the procedure of piercing the ear-lob with an awl in order to create the status of a permanent slave is followed by the phrase – “You shall do the same with regard to your female slave (*amah*).” Scholars like Fishbane and

<sup>47</sup> This view is endorsed by I Mendelson, Y Zakovitch and G Chirichigno.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. G I Emmerson, ‘Women in Ancient Israel’, in “*The World of Ancient Israel*” and H W Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*.

<sup>49</sup> “If a member of the your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman (*ivriyah*) is sold to you and works for six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free.” Deut. 15:12.

Levinson argue for the harmonisation of earlier biblical texts in the biblical period itself by employing the disciplines of “intertextuality” and “inner biblical exegesis”. But other scholars like Cassuto, Falk, Chirichigno, Sprinkle and Westbrook aver that there is evidence that debt-slavery terminable after six years did apply to women as well as men. The status of the *amah* according to Mendelsohn and Cardellini was a distinct form of dependence, designed to create a permanent sexual relationship. Scholars now agree that there is documentary evidence from the ancient Near East that women were taken as debt-slaves for general rather than sexual services more often than men. In the biblical account, Jeremiah refers to the דָרוֹר (*deror*) under King Zedekiah which involved the setting free of both male and female slaves, the latter being referred to by the term *shifhah* rather than *amah*. Did the term *shifhah* indicate the existence of a social institution of debt-slavery for women, distinct from the *amah* or as scholars like Lemche, Westbrook, Houtman and Chavel argue that it might reflect the possibility of editorial textual activity in or after the time of Nehemiah in an attempt to abolish Hebrew debt-slavery completely? It seems reasonable to argue that Exod. 21:4 cannot apply to such a female debt-slave as the term used is *ishah*, who does not go out in the seventh year with the *eved*. As B S Jackson points out “a male debt-slave may be used for sexual services – effectively, to breed permanent slaves for his master – without interference with his status but a woman debt-slave cannot be used for sexual services unless her status is changed.”<sup>50</sup> The relationship between the female slave and the master is by no means a loveless one and indicates the right of slave to justice as unambiguous. In one of the most fascinating books of the

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<sup>50</sup> B S Jackson, *Wisdom Laws*, p. 89. He further adds that sexual activity alters the status of the woman debt-slave, but not that of the male.

Old Testament, the book of Job, this motif is underscored.<sup>51</sup> The priority of the slave laws at the beginning of the *Mishpatim* not only reflect the wider themes of Exodus but set clear parameters for the theme of slavery and freedom in the Bible as a whole.

## CONCLUSION

One of the main contentions of this article is that the manumission laws of Exod.21:2-11 encapsulate in microcosm the wider macrocosm of God's release of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and the covenant relationship of Yahweh with his people. While acknowledging the important contribution of diachronic study with particular reference to the "*Sitz im Leben*" of the manumission laws and source-critical analysis in an attempt to unravel the complexities that surround them, my suggestion is that a careful study of the form and structure of the debt slave laws from a literary and synchronic perspective, yields valuable insights into their *raison d'être*. The juxtaposition of the male and female debt laws betrays an intricate literary structure which greatly enhances an exegetical study of the text. Placed at the beginning of the *Mishpatim*, it is reasonable to suggest that they are not awkwardly inserted but purposefully set in the narrative structure. A deeper motif lies behind these laws that of God's covenant relationship with his people. The *eved* who commits himself to the master for life out of love is symbolic of Israel's relationship to Yahweh

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<sup>51</sup> "If I have rejected the cause of my male or female slaves, when they brought a complaint against me: what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" Job 31:13-15.

and the obligations of the master towards the *amah* is equally symbolic of Yahweh's commitment to Israel. At the heart of this is Yahweh's faithfulness. He acted freely in his initiative to rescue his people from servitude, motivated by compassion and the desire for justice. This radical concept of slavery to freedom and then back to loving servitude is a rich biblical concept which reaches its fulfilment in Christian discipleship. The One who takes the towel and washes the disciples' feet, teaches us that the value of true greatness is to 'be the servant of all'. The celebrated hymn writer George Matheson sets the challenge for us when he writes; "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free."

Rev Dr James Williamson

## Calvin, Angelology and Christology in the Visions of Zechariah 1 and 2.

Rev Colin Burcombe

John's Calvin's commentary on Zechariah is one of the most fruitful places to explore his teaching on angels and his Christological exegesis. In this article we will examine the opening visions in order to discover how he connects angelology and Christology. We will conclude that his exegesis is shaped by his teaching on mediation and accommodation.

With regard to angels, John Calvin's rejection of medieval speculation is almost legendary. He says "Let us remember here, as in all religious doctrine, that we ought to hold to one rule of modesty and sobriety: not to speak, or guess, or even to seek to know, concerning obscure matters anything except what has been imparted to us by God's Word".<sup>1</sup> One would expect then that his teaching on angels will be marked by restraint and limited to clear deductions from the biblical material.

With regard to Christ, a tension seems to exist between Calvin's hermeneutical goal and his exegetical method. In a New Testament commentary he states unambiguously that "the Scriptures should be read with the aim of finding Christ in them".<sup>2</sup> However his Old Testament exegesis has been characterised as theocentric rather than

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Vol. 1, ed. J.T. McNeill; trans. F. L. Battles; Library of Christian Classics 20. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1.14.4, 164.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John* (Vol. 1, trans. T.H.L. Parker; Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), John 5:39, 139.

Christocentric<sup>3</sup>, he was accused of being a Judaizer,<sup>4</sup> he reacted strongly against allegorical methods<sup>5</sup> and he argued against traditional Christological interpretations.<sup>6</sup>

It is intriguing therefore to discover in Calvin a nexus between Angelology and Christology in his exegesis of the Old Testament. From reading the *Institutes*, one might initially expect this to be located in the mysterious figure of the angel of Yahweh, given his initial references to the angel who appeared to the patriarchs and to Manoah. However as we shall see it extends further than that. It is right to begin with the *Institutes* because Calvin's intention was for readers first to read his *Institutes*, then his commentaries. The *Institutes* were to serve as a guide for interpreting Scripture as well as a reference for doctrinal discussions and commonplaces so that his commentaries would be brief. His teaching about the angel of Yahweh is primarily found in 1.13.10 where he is adducing proofs for the deity of Christ in the Old Testament. In his sights are the Jews but this section also boasts the first reference to Servetus in the *Institutes*. One of the charges against Servetus was that he asserted that the angel of Yahweh was no more than a created angel. For Calvin the fact that the angel claimed for himself the name of the eternal God and received worship cannot be explained in a merely representational sense. To support this conclusion he cites various Old Testament passages, the opinion of the *orthodox doctors of the*

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<sup>3</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 137.

<sup>4</sup> See David Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 19).

95) and more recently G. Sujin Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin: Sixteenth-Century Debates over the Messianic Psalms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See for example John Calvin, *Zechariah, Malachi* (Vol. 5 of *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. J. Owen; Michigan: Baker, 2009), 33.

<sup>6</sup> This can be seen in his exposition of Isaiah 63:1 and Micah 5:2.

*Church*<sup>7</sup> and Paul's saying in 1 Cor. 10:4 that Christ was the leader of the people in the wilderness.

Thus in the *Institutes* Calvin makes the case strongly for the angel of Yahweh being Christ. The angel of Yahweh is mentioned in the first and fourth visions of Zechariah. It would not be unexpected were Calvin to assert that this angel, by virtue of his title alone, is Christ. However Calvin does not approach the text like that. In fact he does not comment on the title מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה at all in his exposition of the first vision.

Calvin's commentary on Zechariah was originally a series of lectures which were noted down in short-hand, then transcribed in full before being put into book form. As a result of the extemporaneous lecture format, the commentary suffers from some limitations. While Calvin makes frequent reference to other interpreters, he seldom names them or the works to which he is referring. Some repetition is discernible so that when a subject is mentioned in more than one place Calvin tends to restate his arguments for understanding it in the way he does. Finally, the verse by verse style and the time constraints of each lecture do not always make it possible for Calvin to deal with obvious sub-sections (such as a vision in its entirety) in a single lecture.

An angel is at Zechariah's side as he receives visions from God. At times he asks questions of Zechariah, at other times he responds to questions asked by Zechariah. Calvin lectured on Zechariah while he was completing his last revision of the *Institutes* for publication and the mutual relationship between his exegetical work and the updating of his theological systematization has often been commented upon.<sup>8</sup> In this paper I will continue to refer to the *Institutes* to further explain Calvin's conclusions in his commentaries.

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<sup>7</sup> It is notable that Augustine and Jerome did not share this opinion.

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion in Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 145-152.

*Accommodation.*

Accommodation has long been a subject of interest to Calvin scholars. His uses of this concept are diverse and multi-faceted and affect his exegesis in several ways, as well as his exegetically-derived theology.<sup>9</sup> In his treatment of angels, Calvin shows how God accommodates himself to human capacity by interacting with us through angels rather than directly. He does not say it as directly in his *Institutes* as he does in his commentary on Zechariah but he does state emphatically and prove convincingly there that God makes use of angels not for his own sake but for ours.<sup>10</sup> Having established that point, Calvin teaches that we are to look away from the angels to the Lord of the angels so that we ascribe all glory to him. He says they “lead us away unless they lead us by the hand straight to him”<sup>11</sup> In addition, he says they lead us away “unless they keep us in the one Mediator, Christ, that we may wholly depend upon him, lean upon him, be brought to him, and rest in him”.<sup>12</sup> To summarise then, Calvin says that angels are used by God not because he needs them and cannot carry out his will without their help, but rather because in our weakness we need them. But we are not to think of them in isolation, we are to recognise them as servants of our Lord so that while we may be helped by them, we pray to him and honour him. Angels are also meant to remind us of our Mediator since it is only at his direction and through his intercession that their ministry comes to us.

In his exposition of the first vision of Zechariah, Calvin is even more explicit about how angels are an accommodation of an infinite God

<sup>9</sup> See the brief essay by Jon Balserak “Accommodatio Dei” in *The Calvin Handbook* (ed. Herman J. Selderhuis; trans. Henry J. Baron, Judith J. Guder, Randi H. Lundell, and Gerritt W. Sheeres; Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009), 372-378. He discusses six aspects of God’s accommodating behaviour, treating angels under God’s pastoring of his flock.

<sup>10</sup> See *Institutes* 1.14.11.

<sup>11</sup> *Institutes* 1.14.12.

<sup>12</sup> *Institutes* 1.14.12.

to finite human beings. In this vision the angels appear to be sent out by Yahweh to the four quarters of the earth then they return and report to him. Calvin answers a possible question in the minds of his hearers: since God is omniscient, why should he need angels to see what is happening in his world and tell him of it? He answers:

It is indeed certain, that God receives no information from angels, for nothing is hid from him: nay, all things were fully known to him before he created angels. God, therefore, needs no such helps in order to know what is going on from the rising to the setting sun; but such a mode of speaking often occurs in Scripture; and it is a common thing, that God assumes the character of man in order that he may more familiarly instruct us. Let us then especially bear in mind, that the riders who appeared to the Prophet were angels, who are ever ready to serve God. And they were sent here and there, not that they might declare to God anything unknown to him, but that we may believe that God cares for human affairs; and that though angels appear not to us they are always engaged, and survey the world, so that nothing is done without the knowledge and will of God.<sup>13</sup>

Calvin is saying that in this vision God is assuming the character of a man, as if he were an earthly King whose kingdom is the whole earth. Such a King would need helpers to patrol the earth for him, to observe its inhabitants, and to report back to him so that he could take informed decisions for the benefit of his subjects. Calvin adds later:

Angels are here introduced, because it would be difficult for us to ascend to the highest glory of God. . . . When therefore God thus speaks, it is a mode of teaching suitable to the capacities of men.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 35.

So in all he says about angels in the visions to come, Calvin will be working from within this framework of understanding. While angels are real<sup>15</sup> and they do carry out God's will and serve his people, we are meant to think of him when we are given a glimpse of them. They point us not only to the Creator, their Lord and ours, but also to the Mediator through whom they carry out their ministry to us. The angels are just one instance of God accommodating himself to human capacity and as they are "intermediary messengers"<sup>16</sup> from God to us so they should remind us of and lead us to the true Mediator, Christ.

### *How to Interpret Visions*

Susan Schreiner says that "the history of exegesis requires its students to recognise that premodern exegetes approached a biblical book as a coherent whole."<sup>17</sup> That this is true for Calvin is confirmed in his introductory preface to Zechariah where he says "what our prophet had especially in view was, to remind the Jews why it was that God dealt so severely with their fathers, and also to animate them with hope, provided they really repented, and elevated their minds to the hope of true and complete deliverance... There was among them hardly any fear of God, or hardly any religion. It was therefore needful to blend strong and sharp reproofs with promises of favour, *that they might thus be prepared to receive Christ. This is the substance of the whole.*"<sup>18</sup> It is clear then that for Calvin the purpose of this book was to prepare the returning exiles for the coming of Christ, to lift up their minds to their true and complete deliverance in

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<sup>15</sup> He takes time to establish this point in *Institutes* 1.14.9.

<sup>16</sup> *Institutes* 3.14.5.

<sup>17</sup> Susan E. Schreiner "Exegesis and Double Justice in Calvin's Sermons on Job" *Church History* 58 (1989), 323.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, xiii - xiv.

Him. So in his preface he has identified at least a christotelic<sup>19</sup> if not a Christological purpose for the book.

Calvin admits that visions are obscure in their very nature but aims to explain them clearly with the goal of edifying his hearers.<sup>20</sup> He gives some interpretative principles for understanding visions, noting that many have entertained allegorical interpretations which seem to him frivolous and overly refined. Other interpreters have sought to examine “every single syllable” and he doesn’t believe that is profitable or even possible for this genre of revelation.<sup>21</sup> In addition to this desire to see the big picture and learn the main lessons, Calvin sets out three principles. First he wants to find the prophet’s design, to discern the authorial intention.<sup>22</sup> It is important to notice that while Calvin speaks often about the design or meaning or intention of the prophet, he also refers to the design of the Holy Spirit<sup>23</sup> or God’s design<sup>24</sup> and he is willing to refer to other passages in the New Testament as well as the Old to shed light on the one he is examining. We might say that he had respect for (prophetic) authorial intention but could also read a passage in light of (divine) Authorial intention. Second, the circumstances of the time will be an aid to understanding the passage. That is he will test his interpretation not only by the exegetical context but also by the historical context. An understanding of the message of the prophet to the people *then* is necessary to understand the prophet’s message for now. His third principle is fascinating when he talks of following the analogy between the sign and the thing signified. Calvin not only believes that the sign points towards the thing signified and teaches about it, but also holds that the thing signified helps us to interpret

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<sup>19</sup> The word is coined by Peter Enns “Apostolic Hermeneutics And An Evangelical Doctrine Of Scripture: Moving Beyond A Modernist Impasse” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003), 277.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> These principles are found in Calvin, *Zechariah*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> For example Calvin, *Zechariah*, 59, 91.

<sup>24</sup> For example Calvin, *Zechariah*, 81, 96.

the sign more correctly. In other words the clearer light of historical fulfilment shines back on the sign and helps us observe what it teaches more clearly.

*The Angel of Yahweh.*

The mysterious figure of the Angel of Yahweh is mentioned in the first and the fourth of Zechariah's visions, specifically at 1:11, 12 and 3:1, 6. We must restrict ourselves to the first vision here. Contemporary Old Testament scholars are divided about the significance of this designation and the identity of this specific angel. Is the same angel meant each time the construct phrase is used? If so, is it simply an angel speaking as God's representative? Is it a theophany? Is it a christophany? These three interpretive paths were also open to Calvin.

In Zechariah's first vision found in Zechariah 1:7-17 a man on a red horse is the leader of a company sent out by Yahweh to patrol the earth. This man, later identified as the angel of Yahweh, speaks with Zechariah, explaining what he sees in the vision, then intercedes for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah.

Calvin begins by considering that one angel is set apart from the rest and they report to him. What does it mean that the angels have a leader?

There was one more eminent than the rest, and in this there is nothing unusual; for when God sends forth a company of angels, he gives the lead to some one: and this is the reason why one is described here as more illustrious than all the others. If we regard this angel to be Christ, the idea is consistent with the common usage of Scripture; for Christ, we know, being the head of angels, ever exercises such dominion over them, that in obeying God they do nothing but under his authority. It may be then that one angel assumed here a pre-eminence over the rest, that the Prophet might think of

the Redeemer, who exercises power over angels and the whole Church.<sup>25</sup>

Calvin's conclusions here are cautious. First, the angel here may simply be the leader of this particular angelic mission, since God gives the lead to some angel when he sends forth a company of angels. Second, the angel may be Christ. Calvin does not press this point here or reason for it from first principles, though he does suggest it is apparent elsewhere in Scripture that Christ is head of the angels. We might also distinguish a third possibility, namely that this angel may not be Christ but assumed pre-eminence in order that Zechariah might think of Christ since He is pre-eminent over the angels as well as the church.

Calvin explains his assertion that Christ is Head of the angels most clearly in some later correspondence. He wrote two letters to believers in Poland to refute the belief of a man named Stancaro that Christ was Mediator only in his human nature, not his divine nature. In them he explores further what it means that Christ is head of the angels and mentions three passages which may well be the ones he is thinking of in his exposition of Zechariah 1:11 when he speaks of 'the common usage of Scripture'.

We maintain, first, that the name of mediator suits Christ, not only by the fact that he put on flesh, or that he took on the office of reconciling the human race to God, but from the beginning of creation he already truly was mediator, for he always was the head of the Church, had primacy over the angels, and was the firstborn of every creature (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:15; 2:10). Therefore, we conclude that not only after Adam's fall did he begin to exercise his office of mediator, but since he is the eternal Word of God, both angels as well as men were united to God by his grace so that they would remain uncorrupted. . . . In the role of mediator he is no

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 35.

less head of the angels than of men. This can be seen from the first chapter of Colossians which is by no means appropriate to human nature alone.<sup>26</sup>

Calvin reaches Zechariah 1:12 at the beginning of his next lecture. He considers the fact that the angel intercedes for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah.

The Prophet now shows that the angel who was his guide and teacher, became even a suppliant before God in behalf of the welfare of the Church. Hence the probable opinion is, that this angel was Christ the Mediator. For . . . it is nothing new, that Christ should exercise care over his Church. But if this view be disapproved, we may take any one of the angels to be meant . . . and in this we also see the singular love of God towards us; for he employs his angels especially for this purpose, that he might show that our salvation is greatly valued by him.<sup>27</sup>

Calvin says it is probable that the angel was Christ the Mediator. Then he draws back, saying that any one of the angels could be meant. He infers from the guardian role of the angels that they pray for the church so that the intercession here could be from an angel. It should be noted that Calvin's primary interest here was to speak against the Roman Catholic practice of praying to angels, since one interpretation of this passage may be seen to support that practice.

This section illustrates one of the difficulties of Calvin's verse by verse approach where he simply continued expounding consecutive verses until his time ran out. This verse comes from the same vision as the last and the same angel of Yahweh is speaking that spoke in the previous verse. However Calvin has started a new lecture. He

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph N. Tylenda, "Christ the Mediator: Calvin versus Stancaro," *Calvin Theological Journal* 8/1 (1973): 12.

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 38.

does not refer to his earlier conclusions nor does he refine them in light of this intercessory activity of the angel. Instead he is content to let this verse stand alone and allow that the angel of Yahweh may simply be any of the angels in the company.

If he had been able to treat this vision as a whole in a single lecture, perhaps he would have combined these two ideas – the role of leader over the angels and the activity of intercession for the people of God – to point more clearly to Christ.

One of the most striking omissions in Calvin's exposition here is any discussion of the name of the angel, מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה. Calvin does not assume here that when this designation is used a created angel cannot be in view, instead he looks at what the angel says and does each time in order to see if this is more than a mere angel.

*Not only an angel but God Himself.<sup>28</sup>*

When Calvin expounds the second vision (Zech. 1:18-21), a vision in which the angel of Yahweh is not specifically mentioned, he states his conclusions about the first vision more dogmatically than earlier.

It must also be observed, that in one place he calls him Jehovah, and in another angel; and indeed he speaks thus indiscriminately of one and the same person. It hence follows that God appeared among the angels. *But we must remember what I have already said, that this chief angel was the Mediator and the Head of the Church; and the same is Jehovah, for Christ, as we know, is God manifested in the flesh.* There is then no wonder that the Prophet should indiscriminately call him angel and Jehovah, he being the Mediator of the Church, and also God. He is God, being of the same essence with the Father; and Mediator, having already undertaken his Mediatorial office, though not then

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<sup>28</sup> This phrase is Calvin's from *Institutes* 1.13.10.

clothed in our flesh, so as to become our brother; for the Church could not exist, nor be united to her God without a head. We hence see that Christ, as to his eternal essence, is said to be God, and that he is called an angel on account of his office, that is, of a Mediator.<sup>29</sup>

In these verses there is the angel who speaks and there is Yahweh who shows. Calvin seems to think that Zechariah is speaking of the same individual. Can Yahweh in 1:20 be the angel of 1:19? Why does Yahweh suddenly intervene and speak directly in this vision when he does not in the other visions? This is an issue which very few commentators address. McComiskey does think about it but holds the strange position that while Yahweh is clearly the subject of the verb in verse 20, it is not unreasonable to see verse 21 as a continuation of the conversation between Zechariah and the angel last mentioned in verse 19.<sup>30</sup> Meyers and Meyers suggest that the direct appearance of Yahweh emphasizes divine action and indicates “the fluidity between Yahweh and the angelic figures as mediators of the divine will”.<sup>31</sup> They say Yahweh is performing the role played by the Interpreting Angel<sup>32</sup> in the other visions. They also point out from chapter 1 that while Yahweh sent the horsemen out (verse 10), they report to the Angel of Yahweh (verse 11). They seem to be making a better argument for Calvin’s conclusion than he does himself, though they do not reach the same conclusion. Calvin teaches that this is a conversation between two persons one of whom is designated first as an angel, then as Yahweh. His explanation in the *Institutes* noted above gives other examples of this and affirms

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 57 (italics mine).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas E. McComiskey, *Zechariah* (Vol. 3 of *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*: ed. T. E. McComiskey; Michigan: Baker, 1998), 1048.

<sup>31</sup> Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers. *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1987), 139.

<sup>32</sup> I follow the convention of Meyers and Meyers in capitalising the title of this angel.

his belief that Yahweh is “frequently set forth in the person of an angel”.<sup>33</sup>

Calvin is not only saying that Yahweh and the angel are the same person, he is also saying that the angel who talked with Zechariah and the angel of Yahweh are the same person. Here he differs from many commentators who would make a clear distinction between

Calvin is not only saying that Yahweh and the angel are the same person, he is also saying that the angel who talked with Zechariah and the angel of Yahweh are the same person. Here he differs from many commentators who would make a clear distinction between the two characters.<sup>34</sup> One consequence of this is the perception that the fourth vision is seen to lack unity with the other seven. David Petersen writes “It has become a commonplace for modern commentators on Zech. 3 to observe that the fourth vision differs in certain formal ways from the other visions”.<sup>35</sup> The absence of the Interpreting Angel is identified as a key difference between the fourth vision and the others. The **הַמְלָאֵךְ הַצְבָּר בַּי** is clearly identified in all of the visions except the fourth and sixth.<sup>36</sup> In the fourth vision Zechariah neither asks nor answers any questions and so the Interpreting Angel is not mentioned. In the sixth vision no title is given to the one asking Zechariah a question but the subject is clearly the Interpreting Angel of the previous vision who had similarly asked Zechariah a question. Thus it could be said that all of the visions, with the exception of the

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<sup>33</sup> *Institutes* 1:13.10.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Redditt, Paul L. *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 52.

He says that the man of v9 who is also designated an angel in v11 “is further to be distinguished from the interpreting angel, who is invariably identified as the angel who spoke with Zechariah”. Curiously Edgar W. Conrad, *Zechariah* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 64 as a result of attempting to read Zechariah in the context of the book of the Twelve, suggests that **מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה** may be Haggai because of Haggai 1:13.

<sup>35</sup> Meyers & Meyers, *Haggai & Zechariah* 1-8, 187.

<sup>36</sup> Zech. 1:9; Zech. 1:13; Zech. 1:14; Zech. 2:2; Zech. 2:7; Zech. 4:1; Zech. 4:4; Zech. 4:5; Zech. 5:5; Zech. 5:10; Zech. 6:4.

fourth, include the Interpreting Angel.<sup>37</sup> Only visions one and four mention מלאך־יהָה and in the fourth vision, מלאך־יהָה is a central character. If this is the same divine messenger (performing a different role) as Calvin suggests it means that scholars are wrong to question the unity of this vision with the others in the cycle with regards to the presence of the angel.

It must not be thought that Calvin is alone in his conclusion that these titles represent a single angel, although there are very few others who even engage with the possibility that הַמֶּלֶךְ הַדָּבָר בְּיַהֲוָה and מלאך־יהָה are the same. Meyers and Meyers are among the few who do and they fail to come to a definite conclusion. Commenting on the first vision they write,

The identity of this individual on horseback is a matter of some confusion. Subsequent figures in this vision, the Interpreting Angel (vv 9, 13, 14) and the Angel of Yahweh (vv 11 and 12), perhaps can be identified with each other. . . . The man on horseback, who is surely also an angelic being (cf. Gen. 19:1; 32:25), would then be a distinct actor in this vision; yet in verse 11 he appears to be the same as the Angel of Yahweh. The problem is further complicated by the sudden appearance of the Interpreting Angel as the object of the prophet's query in verse 9 . . . The lack of specificity in Zechariah's use of angelic figures perhaps befits their character as divine beings, which must remain beyond full ken.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> However it may be that angel who shows Zechariah the fourth vision (3:1). This interpreting angel did this earlier in 1:9, although Yahweh showed the prophet a vision in 1:20.

<sup>38</sup> Meyers & Meyers, *Haggai & Zechariah 1-8*, 110.

This ‘confusion’ and ‘complication’ and mystery are resolved by Calvin’s contention that these are simply different designations for the same individual.<sup>39</sup> Sweeney is more definite. He recounts that Zechariah begins an interchange with the man of verse 8, then is answered by the ‘angel who talks with me’ in verse 9. Verse 10 suggests that the angel and the man are two different figures but the fact that verse 11 combines the two descriptions demonstrates that the man and the angel “are one and the same”.<sup>40</sup>

For Calvin, the Interpreting Angel and the Angel of Yahweh are the same individual, namely Christ the Mediator. He is called an angel ‘on account of his office’,<sup>41</sup> which at that time he had begun to fulfill ‘as a sort of foretaste’,<sup>42</sup> of the incarnation. This is the key which unlocks Calvin’s exposition of these first two visions. It may demonstrate that Calvin’s understanding of the Old Testament is more Christ-centred than we would conclude from simply looking for how often he refers to Christ. With this in mind, we could say that for Calvin, in the first vision, Christ is the one riding on a horse, then standing among the myrtle trees, then speaking with Zechariah, then explaining the meaning of the vision, then interceding for the people of Jerusalem and Judah, then giving Zechariah a message for the people. Similarly in the second vision Christ is the angel who answers Zechariah, Christ is Yahweh who shows the craftsmen then explains what they represent. But Calvin did not elaborate on this, nor was he so dogmatic in his conclusions as he lectured verse by verse. He argues similarly in the *Institutes*.

He refers there to Zechariah as evidence that the Old Testament testifies to the divinity of Christ. He chooses to adduce not the Angel

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<sup>39</sup> McComiskey also considers this and comes to the conclusion that one angel is meant in McComiskey, *Zechariah*, 1041. He does not however share Calvin’s conviction that ‘this angel was Christ the Mediator’.

<sup>40</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney *The Twelve Prophets* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press: 2000), 577.

<sup>41</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> *Institutes* 1.13.10.

of Yahweh in chapter 1 or 3 but the angel found in Zechariah 2:3. He writes,

If we review objectively the second chapter of Zechariah, the angel who sends the other angel is immediately declared to be the God of Hosts, and to him is ascribed the highest power.<sup>43</sup>

This conclusion rests on his translation of the difficult verse Zechariah 2:8 (12 Heb.)

כִּי כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אַחֲרֶכֶד שְׁלַחֵנִי אֱלֹהִים הַשְׁלָלִים אֶתְכֶם כִּי  
הַנִּגְעָן בְּכֶם נִגְעָן בְּבִכְתָּעִינוֹ

The question is, where does the direct speech begin in Zechariah 2:8, 9? In Calvin's translation it begins immediately after the divine title.<sup>44</sup> Some versions choose to begin the speech in v9.<sup>45</sup> One way to approach this is to examine how Zechariah uses the phrase כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת elsewhere. It occurs nineteen times in Zechariah.<sup>46</sup> It is obvious in every other occurrence that the direct speech begins immediately after the subject, except for two instances where לְאַמְרָה precedes the speech.<sup>47</sup> Given this pattern, it is very unlikely that the speech would be separated from this subject by such a lengthy parenthesis. Once this is established, there can be no doubt

<sup>43</sup> *Institutes* 1.13.10.

<sup>44</sup> His Latin translation of the Hebrew text reads 'Quia sic dicit Iehova exercituum, Post gloriam misit me ad gentes quae spoliant vos'.

<sup>45</sup> For example the ESV reads "For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye: "Behold . . ." One obvious problem here is that the word glory does not include a pronominal suffix.

<sup>46</sup> The phrase is found in Zech. 1:3; Zech. 1:4; Zech. 1:14; Zech. 1:16; Zech. 1:17; Zech. 2:12; Zech. 3:7; Zech. 6:12; Zech. 7:9; Zech. 8:2; Zech. 8:3; Zech. 8:4; Zech. 8:6; Zech. 8:7; Zech. 8:9; Zech. 8:14; Zech. 8:19; Zech. 8:20; Zech. 8:23.

<sup>47</sup> Zech. 6:12; Zech. 7:9.

that the speaker is one of the angels of Zechariah 2:3.<sup>48</sup> Thus the same person is called an angel and יְהוָה צְבָאֹת. Calvin's translation can be justified, though it raises a theological problem. Who can send יְהוָה צְבָאֹת? Calvin explains in his commentary:

Who is the sender? Or who is he who orders or commands God? We hence conclude that Christ is here introduced, who is Jehovah, and yet the Angel or the messenger of the Father. Though then the being of God is one, expressed by the word Jehovah, it is not improper to apply it both to the Father and to the Son. Hence God is one eternal being; but God in the person of the Father commands the Son, who also is Jehovah, to restrain the nations from injuring the Jews by any unjust violence. The rabbis give this explanation – that the Prophet says that he himself was God's herald, and thus recites his words; but this is forced and unnatural. I indeed wish not on this point to contend with them; for being inclined to be contentious, they are disposed to think that we insist on proofs which are not conclusive. But there are other passages of Scripture which more clearly prove the divinity and the eternal existence of Christ, and also the distinction of persons. If however any one closely examines the words of the Prophet, he will find that this passage must be forcibly wrested, except it be understood of Christ. We then consider that Christ is here set forth as the Father's herald; and he says that he was sent to the nations.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> For Calvin's position to be consistent, we must assume that he takes the speaker to be the Interpreting Angel. This may not seem to be a plain reading of the English text but Meyers and Meyers argue for this from the Hebrew text: "The speaker is understood to be the Interpreting Angel, the chief angelic figure of the visions, since the closest antecedent to the subject of this verb is the object pronoun of the previous verb in verse 7 (RSV v 3)" *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, 152.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 68.

Calvin has been accused of being a Judaizer and ceding too much ground to the Jewish commentators in his interpretation of the Old Testament but here, while recognising that they will disagree, he states firmly that the passage must be ‘wrested’ to apply it to anyone but Christ. Calvin expounded the Old Testament with an eye to rabbinic interpretation and this may help explain his reticence at times in arguing for Christological conclusions. However he does in the end firmly conclude that “Christ is here set forth”.

### *Conclusion*

Where does the nexus between Angelology and Christology lie for Calvin? Calvin makes the connection in three ways, through accommodation, in the Angel of Yahweh, and by attending closely to the voices in the text. We began with accommodation and while the incarnation was the supreme act of accommodation,<sup>50</sup> the work of angels is also an accommodation of God to human weakness. Balserak explains it as part of God’s pastoral care for his people<sup>51</sup> and Calvin stresses that it is meant to lead our minds to God and Christ.<sup>52</sup> Thus for Calvin every appearance in Scripture of an angel should lead us to Christ who “because of the primacy that he holds in the person of the Mediator, is called an angel”.<sup>53</sup> We then considered מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה and saw that while Calvin does not discuss the term itself or automatically assume that every appearance of מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה is “an angel in whom full deity dwelt”,<sup>54</sup> he does (in retrospect) firmly identify מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה in Zechariah’s first vision as ‘the Mediator and

<sup>50</sup> See the discussion and distinction made by Jon Balserak “The accommodating act par excellence?: an inquiry into the incarnation and Calvin’s understanding of accommodation.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002): 408-423.

<sup>51</sup> Balserak, *Accommodatio*, 375-376.

<sup>52</sup> *Institutes* 1.14.12.

<sup>53</sup> *Institutes* 1.14.9.

<sup>54</sup> *Institutes* 1.13.10. Notice his discussion of the first vision where he allows that the מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה may simply be the angelic leader for this particular mission rather than the divine Head of the angels.

the Head of the Church'.<sup>55</sup> Finally we noted that Calvin pays close attention to the voices in Zechariah 1:18-21 and Zechariah 2 and this leads him to suggest the Interpreting Angel is also the Mediator.

From these three connections we can discern that for Calvin Angelology and Christology meet via the theological concepts of mediation and accommodation. Recent studies of Calvin's Christology have shown that the idea of Christ as Mediator encompasses his person and his work and is helpful for analysing Calvin's Christological formulations.<sup>56</sup> As Mediator Christ is our prophet, priest and king and all of these roles can be dimly discerned as the angels ministered to Zechariah and through him to the restored community. Accommodation is very closely connected. In fact Edmondson describes the appearances of the mediator in the form of a man or an angel in the Old Testament as "God's accommodated presence".<sup>57</sup>

Wallace summarises Calvin's view that Christ is the Mediator of all revelation<sup>58</sup> from God to men and emphasises that this is true not only of that time since the Word was made flesh but also when he temporarily took the likeness of a man or an angel in the Old Testament. Mediating divine revelation is a prophetic role of Christ. Calvin writes elsewhere,

We are thus to understand, that, since the beginning of the world, God has held no intercourse with men, but through the agency of his eternal Wisdom or Son. Hence Peter says, that the holy prophets spake by the "Spirit of Christ," (1 Pet. 1:12) and Paul

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<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Zechariah*, 57.

<sup>56</sup> See Stephen Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Mark D. Thompson "Calvin on the Mediator" in *Engaging with Calvin* (ed. Mark D. Thompson; Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 106-135.

<sup>57</sup> Edmondson, *Christology*, 195.

<sup>58</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), 8-10.

makes him the leader of the people in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:4). And certainly the Angel who appeared to Moses, (Exod. 3:2) can be no other person; for he claims to himself the peculiar and essential name of God, which is never applied to creatures. . . . He has always been the Mediator of all doctrine, because by him God has always revealed himself to men.<sup>59</sup>

So the mention of an angel who explained visions to a prophet would draw Calvin's mind to Christ.

When Calvin writes in the *Institutes* of Christ's work as priest, he focuses on the activities of reconciliation and intercession.<sup>60</sup> He says Christ is "an everlasting intercessor: through his pleading we obtain favour".<sup>61</sup> He connects the work of intercession with Christ's role as Mediator in his comment on Isaiah 19:20, "God assists us through Christ, by whose agency he gave deliverance to his own people from the beginning. He has always been the Mediator, by whose intercession all blessings were obtained from God the Father".<sup>62</sup> He argues from John 1:51 that it is "only through Christ's intercession . . . that the angels' ministrations come to us".<sup>63</sup> In Zechariah 1:12 surely the very fact that the prophet is allowed to eavesdrop on the prayer of the angel to Yahweh (then hear the answer) is itself an accommodating act of God. When Calvin reads of an angel who intercedes for Jerusalem it is not surprising that he should think of Christ who as Mediator has ever cared for his church.

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<sup>59</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (trans. William Pringle; Michigan: Baker, 2009), 102.

<sup>60</sup> Curiously Edmondson omits any consideration of this in his extensive treatment of the priestly role of Christ. See Edmondson, *Christology*, 89-114.

<sup>61</sup> *Institutes* 2.15.6.

<sup>62</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Vol. 2, trans. William Pringle; Michigan: Baker, 2009), 74.

<sup>63</sup> *Institutes* 1.14.12.

Calvin's commentary on Zechariah is one of the most fruitful places to look for his teaching on angels. His main emphasis in these opening visions is that Christ is the head of the angels both in terms of ruling over them as their King and taking the lead in this mission to the prophet Zechariah. He even suggests that when Yahweh showed Zechariah this leader of the angelic forces it was to cause him to think of the Redeemer. More often than not though he simply refers to the angels Zechariah sees and hears as angels, not as Christ. Calvin does not seek to establish Christological doctrines out of a reflection on these passages, that work is done in the *Institutes* where his teaching is derived from all of Scripture. He comes closest to doing this in his exposition of Zechariah 2:8 where he mentions the divinity and eternal existence of Christ and the distinction of persons, but he does this only to assure the reader that there are other passages of Scripture which more clearly establish these truths.

Calvin did exercise restraint in his exposition of the work of angels arising from the opening vision. He was also restrained in his fulfillment conclusions, though he did state them firmly on occasion. It seems that sometimes his restraint was an accommodation to his exegetical opponents. While his conviction that the Old Testament should be read with the aim of finding Christ is undeniable, he is equally aware of differences between the Old and New Testaments.<sup>64</sup> He says of the patriarchs "those mysteries which they but glimpsed in shadowed outline are manifest to us."<sup>65</sup> In his interpretation he was mindful of the historical circumstances of the prophecy but occasionally he allowed the thing signified, the Christological, to shed light back on the sign, the vision or promise. This was especially true of the incarnation.<sup>66</sup> This led him to speak in terms of Christ the Mediator rather than God being present in the form of an angel in the visions of Zechariah because Christ was at last to come

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<sup>64</sup> See *Institutes* 2.11 for his full discussion of this.

<sup>65</sup> *Institutes* 2.9.1.

<sup>66</sup> Compare Calvin's commentary on John 9:5.

not just in the form of a man or an angel, but taking the very nature  
of a man.

Rev Colin Burcombe.